

# Educating Our Little Brown Cousins

Washington, D. C.  
I WANT to tell you how Uncle Sam has attached the dynamo of modern education to the dead wires of the Porto Rican brain. I first visited Porto Rico in 1898, just after we took over the island. The country was semi-barbarous, intelligence slumbered and the masses were mentally dead. In about 700,000 people who were over ten years of age not one in five could read Spanish. The people were more ignorant than the Cubans and more so than those of any other West Indian island. Nominally, there were 500 schools which had been run by the Spanish, but in reality there was only one public school building, and the teaching was done in private houses, to which only the children of the poor were admitted, without paying tuition. The salaries were pitifully small, and many of the teachers took boarders to aid in their support. In some places the school was held in the dining room, and the pupils crowded out at meal times to give place to the diners. The reading books were made up of the legends of saints, and the geographies were almost antediluvian. There was little regularity of attendance, and one of our school inspectors found an important school closed when he stopped there to visit it, because the teacher and all the scholars had adjourned to go to a cock fight.

As to the girls' school, these were as a rule made up of the daughters of the rich. Nowhere were the girls allowed in the same schools with the boys, and if a town could not afford two schools, the girls stayed at home. Industrial schools there were none, and the pupils all told, according to the Spanish statistics, were about 18,000.

## More Schools Than We Have.

Such was the condition when Uncle Sam applied the dynamo. That was just about thirteen years ago. Look at the situation to-day! I have the information not from the tropics. It comes to me through a talk which I had the other evening with Dr. Edwin G. Dexter, the Commissioner of Education, of Porto Rico. He has had charge of the schools for the past four years, and has just left Washington to go back to his post. He has been here visiting our little brown cousins to whom the Porto Rican government has given scholarships in the great universities, and has also been preparing plans for school development. Said he:

"Porto Rico now stands ahead of the United States in its common school facilities. We have 2,600 schools in an area of 3,400 square miles. That makes one school to every square mile and a half. In the United States there is one for every nine square miles, and there are only one or two states in the Union which are as thickly dotted with schools as we are. We have school buildings which have cost over \$300,000, and many which would be a credit to the United States. There is one at Arecibo which contains twenty-two rooms, and another at San Juan which cost \$65,000.

"We have now 145,000 children in the schools," Dr. Dexter went on. "That is 13 per cent. of our population, or one in every eight men, women and children in the country. It is a larger attendance proportionately than that of any Spanish-speaking people of the world, or of any country in the Western hemisphere. It is far more than you will find in Spain or Portugal or any country of Southern Europe. In the United States the proportion of the school buildings of Cuba or the Philippines. Moreover, this percentage is increasing the number of children in our school, having doubled in the past four years."

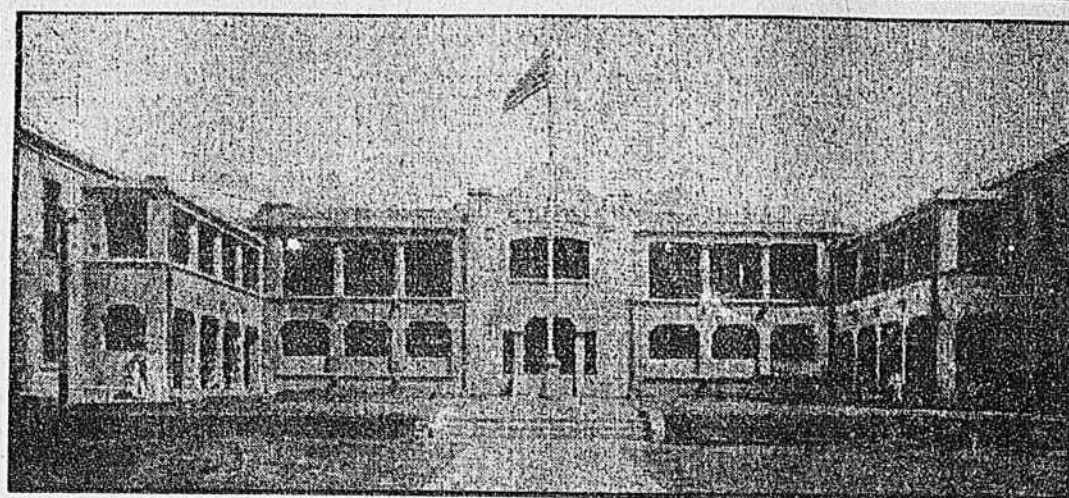
## Making American Citizens.

"But what language do you teach these children, Dr. Dexter?" I asked. "Are they still learning Spanish? Or are you teaching them our American language and American ways?"

"The American flag flies over every Porto Rican schoolhouse, and there is a special ceremony of raising it every morning. The children salute the flag as it goes up and as they do so they say:

"I pledge my allegiance to my flag and to the country which it represents."

"This is universal. In rainy days the flag is raised inside the patio, and the same is done in some of the city schools which are on business streets. I believe the children are proud of their Americanism, and of the fact



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Uncle Sam is establishing public playgrounds everywhere.

that they are a part of our nation.

"As to the languages taught," continued Dr. Dexter, "all of the text books in the ordinary branches of study are in English. The recitations are in English, and the children everywhere speak English. At the same time they are taught Spanish, the tongue of their ancestors, and they study both Spanish history and American history. The Spanish is taught as a language study and the children of American residents in Porto Rico easily learn it. I have four children in the public schools and they all speak Spanish as well as English. Their playmates speak Spanish, but their ordinary conversation, but the children everywhere are able to speak both languages. My youngest child, when talking to the servants, always speaks Spanish."

## Porto Rican Teachers.

"Who are your teachers?" I asked. "The most of them are Porto Ricans. We have from one hundred and fifty to two hundred American teachers and something like two thousand Porto Ricans. The majority of the native teachers are men, although many are women. There are more women than men among the teachers. The Americans are nearly all college graduates, and the Porto Rican teachers have either studied English in the United States or Porto Rico. They have to pass an examination in English, and the law requires that there must at least be one teacher of English in every municipality."

## Graded Schools Everywhere.

"What kind of an education does the Porto Rican get?"

"A very good one," was Dr. Dexter's reply. "We have now schools of all classes from the kindergarten to the high school, and we have agricultural schools, normal schools and a good university."

"The public school system is modeled after that of America, and the grades are the same. As it is now there are kindergartens only in the larger cities. Out in the country the children begin their school life at six in the first grade, and when they are through the grades they are able to enter the high school of the larger municipalities.



SCENE IN A SCHOOL GARDEN.



Porto Rico has schools of all classes, from kindergartens to high schools.

There are now high schools at San Juan, Ponce and Mayaguez, each of which has a four-year course, and from which the graduates are able to enter the University of Porto Rico or any college of the United States without difficulty.

"In addition to this we give partial high school courses in eighteen different municipalities, and in these schools we have now almost a thousand students."

## Night Schools and Normal Schools.

"Are the people anxious to learn?"

"Yes, indeed. They not only want their children to go to school, but many of them go to school themselves. We now have about 160 night schools, with something like 10,000 students enrolled. These schools are maintained in all but one of the municipalities, and the majority of the persons attending them are adults. They are held in most cases in the same school buildings as those used in the daytime, and are carried on at a very moderate expense.

"As to the desire of the children to go to school, this is evidenced by the large number who are now attending, and the fact that it is great, or than that of the United States. I believe the desire for education is increasing, and we are doing all we can to popularize it."

## Athletics in Porto Rico.

"How about athletics? Do the children play football and baseball as our children do?"

"Yes, although they hardly knew how to play at all when we first took possession of the island. The Spanish boy of the past rather looked down on athletics. To-day he is as crazy over them as his little American brother. He belongs to his football team and he enjoys watching the growth of his biceps. We now have athletic meets at which the companies from the different schools take part. We had one last year in which more than 200 contestants took part. They came from many different towns, and their records were creditable."

## Public Playgrounds for Children.

"We are now establishing school playgrounds everywhere. More than 10,000 have been invested in their equipment, and the day will come when every island school will have its gymnastic machinery."

"And then the school bands," continued Dr. Dexter. "The Porto Ricans are naturally musical, and nearly every school has its band. At the athletic meets these bands contest as to which can play the best, and the banner is given to the one making the best showing. At the last tournament twenty-one school bands contested. Among the instrument players were children only eight years old."

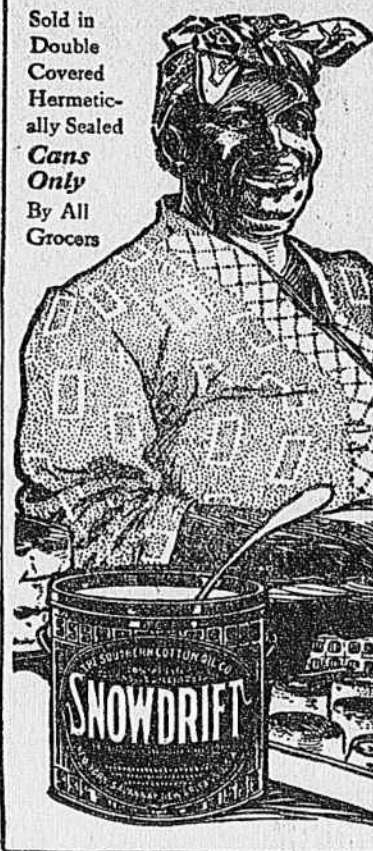
"How were your playgrounds established?"

"They are comparatively a new thing on the island. We had only one

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of States. The San Juan playgrounds are equipped with kindergarten tents, giant strides, swings, see-saws, rope ladders and jumping standards. They have climbing ropes, climbing poles and climbing spars. They have bean-bags, quilts and baseball outfits. In the smaller towns the equipment is much less, and sometimes it is limited only to a baseball outfit. Baseball is the most popular game in Porto Rico, and every school has its club."

## School Savings Banks.

"I understand that you have school savings banks?"

"Yes, we have regular school banks in every town with more than fifty thousand depositors. They now have eight or ten thousand dollars of savings in such banks, the average amount being less than a dollar. The child can deposit as little as one cent at a time. The teacher gives a card or slip on which a record is made, and when the child has as much as \$5 he can transfer his account to one of the savings banks of the island. In these school banks the supervisor receives each week the deposits made by the children through the teachers. These banks are very popular and the custom is teaching economy and thrift."

"Have these banks anything to do with the Post-Office Department?"

"No. They were first organized about two years ago, some time before our postal savings banks were begun. Already about seven hundred of the children depositors have started individual accounts in the national or city bank of the towns in which they live. As it is now, on the average, after two years only, we have about one child in every eighteen who is carrying an account in the school savings banks. This means much for the future of Porto Rico."

## A Good Place for Spare Books.

The conversation here turned to the subject of school libraries, and Dr. Dexter told me that the government is anxious to increase this educational feature, and that arrangements have been made with the steamship companies to carry free from New York to San Juan any books that may be donated. Said he:

"I brought up the subject at the peace conference at Mohonk last year and asked for donations. Since then we have received 10,000 volumes, and have established 246 libraries. We have also traveling libraries, consisting of boxes holding about fifty books each. These boxes are made of a lot of soldiers' kits that were sold at auction at San Juan a couple of years ago. I bought them, put shelves in each kit and painted the words 'Porto Rican School Library' on its outside. When finished, each held about fifty or sixty books, and was of such a shape and size that it could be carried on horseback over the rough trails of the island. We sent them from school to school in out-of-the-way districts, and we find them greedily read. The stationary libraries are widely patronized. Many of them are in the schoolhouses. These are kept open after dark, and the people come in and read."

## The University and the Normal Schools.

The University of Porto Rico, Dr. Dexter tells me, is at the top of the educational system of the island, although it is not directly under the Department of Education. The Commissioner of Education, however, is ex-officio its chancellor, and also president of the Board of Trustees. The university is about the same as one of our State universities. It has a college of liberal arts and one of agriculture, as well as a normal department.

The attendance at this university last year numbered more than 1,000, and had the regular terms and also a summer school which lasted eight weeks. There were more than 400 school teachers at that summer school, and there are over 300 students in the normal department.

The university has a campus of 120 acres at Rio Piedras, near San Juan, and it has a large farm at Mayaguez next to the Agricultural Experiment Station there. Upon the Mayaguez farm there are fields of coffee, sugar and tobacco, and orchards of all sorts of fruits. The boys run a dairy, connected with which are a number of registered Jerseys and Holsteins, and they have also a bee farm and a poultry farm.

This university should be a good training school for such of our young men as wish an equipment for business in the South American countries. It has better courses in the Spanish language and literature than any institution in the United States, and more extended courses in English than can be found in Spanish America. For this reason it is believed that it will draw students from both North and South,

and will thus become a Pan-American university.

## Porto Rican Students in the United States.

It will be surprising to many to know that the Porto Rican government has a large corps of students at our best colleges, and that it pays their expenses out of the island treasury. This has been done for several years, and it will be continued. The students chosen for sending to the United States are those who have stood highest in the high schools and normal schools of the island. There are thirty-nine scholarships, which are apportioned out among such boys and girls, and at present they are held by twenty-five boys and fourteen girls. Each of these scholarships carries an allowance of \$500 a year, and in addition there are twenty others which carry \$250 per year. The latter are for colored students, and they admit them to such institutions as Tuskegee and Hampton. Among the colleges which are attended by those receiving five-hundred-dollar scholarships are the Boston Tech, Cornell, Columbia, University of Pennsylvania, the University of Illinois, Iowa State College and others.

In addition to this there are scholarships for the graded schools, which give allowances to the highest graduates of those schools so that they may have a course free of charge at one of the high schools, or in the normal or agricultural schools, or the university of Porto Rico. This allowance is \$12 per month, which, with the low prices of Porto Rico, is supposed to be enough to support a boy or girl at these institutions.

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## PINEHURST

[Special to The Times-Dispatch.]

Pinehurst, N. C., January 13.—Marking midwinter's commencement, the opening of the Hotel Carolina inaugurates the winter's more formal social affairs, many of which have commenced the week. For the regular Wednesday and Saturday hope the entire colony has gathered, with numerous dinners and evenings of bridge. Mr. and Mrs. Allan Lord, of Washington, entertained a party of eight dinner guests, and Mr. and Mrs. Justus Kendall, of Worcester, were hosts in honor of Vice-President C. R. Cappe and General Passenger Agent C. B. Ryan, of the Seaboard. Bridge for charity at "Red Gables," the home of Mrs. Charles A. Sinclair, of Boston, on Monday, was followed by smaller parties given by Mrs. Irving S. Robinson, of Rochester, Miss. Elizabeth Cummings, of Baltimore; Mrs. E. S. Skilton, of Chicago; Mrs. Lord, Mrs. Kendall and others.

Out-of-door attention has been divided between golf, quail shooting, which was never better, and fox hunting, which is providing the rarest of sport, while many others find time, riding and motoring to their liking. For the coming week many things are planned in connection with the advertised men's golf tournament, the largest in the history of these annual meetings.

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